

SIX

A LIFE UNRAVELED

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Either now we change or we don't. We are a family of addicts. My parents took on the battle of addiction. They let me know about the love of a drug, but it was all so surreal. My brother pretty much raised me even though he was only three years older. My brother functioned when the rest of us could not. Even when he was on drugs, he took me under his wing. He was always capable of taking care of me in ways I could count on, and I depended on him entirely. He was my anchor, my brother, and my friend. One time, I remember sitting on the steps of my brother's friend's house passing a blunt. The sky was low and long. He told me how much he loved me and how nothing could ever break our bond. Even though my brother was addicted he rose above it and got away entirely. He joined the Air Force and chose to do something with his life. This became another reason for me to use and made my addiction stronger – the one I trusted the most left me by myself. But it was all worth it in the end.

Our parents were physically there, but emotionally absent and on dope. When they were not at home, I would go into their room and stomp on their glass pipes hoping that it would bring them home. It didn't work. We were a family of addicts. The only thing I knew was to get good grades, but they seemed uninterested. The only thing that mattered was the drug game. To me, I had no idea what it was like to have standard parents so-to-speak. I needed to know *why*... I needed to know what was so important about the high. What was so good about being high that it would keep my parents from me? Why was I abandoned, left behind, and irrelevant? Nothing I could ever say would bring them back to me or reality. Their reality was catching that next fix.

Not once did my parents encourage my drug use. I never did listen. My parents busted me and my brother once. Our pupils

like black buttons, they automatically knew we were high. But what could they say? Nothing, that's what. The conditions in which we lived were hell. The severity of the dirtiness was uncomfortable, but only for a minute, and then it became normal. We were a family of addicts. I'd call my parents and ask "When you comin' home?" Their answer: "Don't worry about it. We'll be home soon..." Two hours later, still nothing. I wanted their attention and good grades wasn't cutting it, so I began running away. I began causing scenes and starting shit. My anger was righteous, my head tilted back howling my pain. All I wanted was for them to hear me, see me, and understand me. Through all this I was raped twice, once by a family friend and once by a stranger. These incidents encouraged my drug use and reduced my self-worth. I quit giving a fuck and thought, "no one cares about me, so why should I?" Degradation took the place of self-care. I didn't give a shit. I felt like a whore. There was no regard for my body, the most private of my property. This violation aided my depression and made it all the more serious. My life's value went down the drain. My family tried to help me, but they couldn't understand why I was the way I was. My suffering brought me to the point of wanting to die.

Even after everything I have put my family through and everything they have put me through, not once have they ever left me behind and I have never left them behind. After it all you'd think that we would have broken apart, our family shattered like those glass pipes. My family, besides my mom, has had its fair share of incarceration. If it wasn't one, it was the other or none of us at all. Even though I am now the one imprisoned, my family's support is amazing. Life-changing events happen on the daily, but it's how you handle them. You can be on the grind, but which grind you pick up is what counts. They are a constant in my life for better or worse. When they were addicts I had to grow up extremely fast, but now, with their help I have been able to grow into the young adult I always imagined I would be. Truthfully, it's all because of my parents. Good or bad, I am who I am, and for what it's worth we keep coming together, stronger than ever – a

family. Knowing that in the end we're all we've got. Our sobriety is priceless. Our relationship as a family is stronger because of sobriety and there is nothing I could ever want more than a sober family like the one I've got. My parent's sobriety is worth everything and if they had not gotten clear-headed when they did, I truly do not know where I would be. I couldn't be more proud of them and I thank them every day for all they have done. We are a strong independent family and that is all that matters to us. Without each other we have nothing.

THE BLUE APARTMENT

I hung onto my boyfriend's arm as I drunkenly stumbled down the street, constantly forgetting where we were going, but then remembering all at the same time, "oh, yeah, cigarettes." The sidewalk was cracked, pitted, and run down, but it was in better shape than me. The big sign loomed, flashing "OPEN," glaring red. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw a jittery man in a striped shirt propped up on the side of the building, a little out of view, but visible all the same. My boyfriend walked inside to get smokes. I wasn't old enough to buy cigarettes so I stayed outside. I walked across to the side of the building and asked the bundle of nerves for a cigarette and he handed me a mostly empty pack of Camel Wides. The man in stripes obviously knew I was wasted; I lit a cigarette and he looked at me hard. He asked if there was *anything else I do*; I said yes. Behind the gas station and across a graveled alley sat a run-down little blue apartment building with peeling paint and an air of dereliction. This is where the thin man stayed.

I left my boyfriend in that convenient store and headed off, fearless and afraid. The building was all too familiar; the crowd was all too familiar. I was oh-so-used to this environment. This was everything I knew and didn't want to know. My old life stopped and a new life began in a cramped dingy apartment. My eyes zeroed in and everything paled into the background, a glass pipe in my hand. I sat on the couch faded and filthy, the smell of cat urine hung in the air; I knew without even asking what was to

come. Clear white shards inside a cloudy pipe. Tremendous. Horrific. Those shards looked like forever. It was second nature, hitting that pipe, twirling it expertly in my hand. Nobody lied to me. It was amazing. The high equals being on top of the world, the high made me feel like I could conquer the world. It was the highest I had ever been. Nothing could bring me down. Nothing. It numbed everything. I liked the big cloud of smoke, white and opaque; I exhaled cumulus clouds. The high was so intense that I could feel each droplet of sweat. Sometimes it felt like there were bugs, like little needles, under my arm; feeling hunger and thirst but not being able to eat or drink. Seventeen years it took me to try it – or even think about trying it. A split-second decision changed my life forever. Abyss.

QUEEN OF DESTRUCTION

My crime is the ending. It only took six months from trying it to committing my crime. I accidentally took the lives of two people I loved. It started with the guy who had the drugs. The dope game isn't easy; you've got to be on point, it's the constant hustle, the weighing of dope on a scale, everything has to be the exact amount. Everything can be taken from you, including your life. Street smarts are about using your head and not being afraid. I called the dope man every day for six months and began dealing, with him, to anyone. I didn't have to work hard to persuade him, I already had it all: connections, the know-how, and I knew exactly what he was looking for: a girl foot-soldier. Someone to do his dirty work, and I fit the description. This was mutual manipulation. We fed off each other, a real-life fatal attraction. Aside from being addicted to the drug high, I was addicted to the money. This relationship was deadly; strictly business. I loathed him, but in the end it was all about the money, dope, and the hustle.

I began seeing him on a regular basis and he kept feeding me dope. I began selling for him, getting half the amount of profits along with pounds of dope. The crisp feeling of hundred dollar bills rolled tightly in my hand made me feel unstoppable. I was

loving life. I had everything I wanted and nothing to worry about, constantly on the prowl for life's next fix. For months this was how I lived. I was a female hustler; Queen of Destruction, a whirlwind of harm that left bodies behind. On a cold winter night, the wind howled down the mountain whipping through the links of a chain; I gripped the end tightly, swung it, and the glass shattered. I strolled casually from car to car, a reign of demolition. I ended up with tickets and in drug court. My dependency on drugs wasn't strictly about meth. Any drug would do. As long as I was altered I was able to exist within myself. All drugs were good drugs. In the fall, I huffed and consciousness fled. My crime is the ending and my new beginning.

MY DEMON

My Demon looks like many faces coalesced into one. At different times in my life, he has transformed and shape-shifted, but always remained evil. Black shadows sit on my right shoulder. I go to look at him, and he disappears. I turn away from him, and he is right back on my shoulder, haunting my peripherals. My Demon is not seen or heard by others unless he wants to be. We first met when I was seven. I could feel his presence. The room instantly turned cold, the hairs on the back of my neck stood up, goose bumps raced down my arms, and my breath turned to fog. The air felt like tiny glass shards catching in my throat, making it difficult to breathe. My demon began sending messages to family as another method of control. One day, when my brother and I were the only two at home, my brother decided to take a shower. While he was drying himself off, he looked up at the mirror and noticed a hand print. He called my name, asking me to come and look. It was not a human hand. Tiny lines looked like crackled glass, the fingers were pointed, and it looked as if he had left his mottled ashy skin behind. I took a picture of it but mysteriously it was deleted, never to be seen again. When my mom came home, we told her about the experience. She frantically tried scrubbing it

away with glass cleaner, but it would not come off. Two days later it was inexplicably gone.

As my addiction progressed, my Demon assumed full control and kept telling me to do things: “hurt yourself, hurt yourself, hurt yourself,” and I would listen. He steered my actions. My Demon was the second voice in my head, like a split personality. I felt crazy. My Demon hadn’t always been so strong; my dependence strengthened him. He grew large. I felt like a crone, ragged, withered, and old. My Demon perched on my back crushing me while he fed on me, sucking and savoring the rich meat of my suffering.

After my crash happened and I was alone sitting in a concrete cell, I was done. I had given up, nearly at the bottom. I finally told my Demon “No, no, no!” that he was not running my life anymore. No more darkness, no more sadness, no more nothing. He began to shrink taking up less space, but he is still lurking, making me tremble, making me worry about what he could do next. Sometimes I feel the panic rising, the old feelings swirling, but I’m stronger than he is. I will come out on top. I have strength, I will win this time. He thinks he’s in control, but I have gained control. Conquering my demon is beautiful. I watch the light fight its way in; it’s like the sun shimmering right above my head. It’s a process, fighting my demon. It’s not easy and I have to dig deep inside myself to find the strength, the fight, whatever I have left inside to defeat my horrific enemy, My Demon. I still feel unsure, but what I do know is that I am strong enough to win. We all have demons, whether good or bad, they exist. It is how we deal with them that matters. In the end, my family is what keeps me sane. They are everything I need. We are all we’ve got.